

# Golf is a Game for Everybody!

As we get closer to the beginning of another hectic golf season, I'm sure your club members are starting to come back out of the woodwork. Re-engaging with your memberships in the spring surely serves as a reminder of the diversity of each club's golfers – every club's roster is filled with people of different abilities, and part of the beauty of golf is that it's accessible to almost everybody, regardless of differences in ability. The Rules of Golf recognizes these differences in the golfing community, and in an effort to offer the joy of the game to as many people as possible, there is a special set of Rules for players with disabilities. To quote the Rules book, "the goal of these Modified Rules is to allow a player with a disability to play fairly with players who have no disabilities, the same disability, or different types of disabilities." This information will be especially useful to those of you who participate in the NEPGA's HOPE Program (in which you may be working with wounded veterans) or those of you who volunteer with the Special Olympics golf programs, but I'd also like to spread the word to help you accommodate any of your members who may have a disability and show them a great time at your facility!

What follows is a brief summary of the various provisions that can be made for players with disabilities, but for a more complete picture, please take a look at the complete Rules for Players with Disabilities – it can be found in the very last section of the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf. These Rules are broken down into the following sub-sets, to better accommodate a variety of people:

- Players who are blind
- Players who are amputees
- Players who use assistive mobility devices
- Players with intellectual disabilities

## #RulesToThe Max

*Max Doctoroff, PGA  
Tournament Director  
New England PGA*



### Players Who Are Blind

Most of the provisions made for blind players are modifications to Rule 10.2 and 10.3 (Advice/Help and Caddies, respectively). Under these modified Rules, blind players may have an aide to help them during their round, in addition to their caddie. What this means is the player is allowed to ask for and get advice from an aide and a caddie at the same time. Additionally the aide or caddie is allowed to stand behind the player on an extension of their line of play during the stroke, to help them line up (the usual general penalty is waived). A couple caveats here are that the player is only allowed one aide and one caddie at a time, and those two individuals can not share duties (e.g. the aide may not carry the player's clubs, that's the caddie's job).

Another allowance these special Rules make is that a blind player will not be penalized for touching the sand in a bunker with their club near the ball or during the backswing. It wouldn't be fair to penalize someone for touching something they can't see! They are still not allowed to intentionally test the condition of the sand, however. Finally, the player's aide is allowed to lift the player's ball on the putting green at any time, even without prior authorization. Generally this is a privilege only a player's caddie has.

### Players Who Are Amputees

The modified Rules address some challenges that amputees will face on the golf course as well, to help level the playing field. First things first, they clarify that prosthetic devices are not abnormal equipment subject to penalty under Rule 4.3. They also allow for amputees to anchor their club during

a stroke, if the player would be unable to hold and swing the club without anchoring. The penalty under Rule 10.1b is waived in this case. Finally, since amputees may have difficulty with dropping, placing, or replacing their ball, these modified Rules allow an amputee to authorize any person to drop, place, or replace their ball without limitation (generally only the player is allowed to take these actions, with a few exceptions).

## Players Who Use Assistive Mobility Devices

Assistive Mobility Devices (hereafter AMD's) are becoming more commonplace at golf courses, which is great news for many disabled golfers! With their popularity rising, of course the Rule Book needed to address them. The first provision that the modified Rules make is that players using AMD's may get help from any person (including another player!). Such a person could help the player by lifting their ball on the putting green, return a ball back into play by dropping or placing, and positioning the player or the AMD. While we're on the topic of help, players using AMD's are also allowed to have an aide, with the same privileges and restrictions as in the section about blind players above.

Since players using AMD's will often not be standing on their feet while making a stroke, the definition of "stance" has been modified under these special Rules to allow players to make a stroke while sitting on an AMD without penalty. Fair warning though: most other Rules regarding fairly taking a stance still apply (the player still may not build a stance or improve the conditions affecting the stroke beyond what is necessary for the AMD to help the golfer make a stroke. Another notable difference under these modified rules has to do with taking lateral relief from the point of entry from a red penalty area: the relief area is expanded from two club-lengths to four club-lengths, to allow enough room for the device while still allowing the player to make their next

stroke. For the sake of brevity, I've left out a handful of other provisions for players using AMD's, so please consult the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf if these apply to any of your players.

## Players with Intellectual Disabilities

The modified Rules for players with intellectual disabilities are based on the understanding that the amount of help needed can vary significantly depending on the nature of the individual's disability, so they offer a broader range of help that the players can receive from other people. Under these Rules the player may have an aide, a caddie, or both, subject to the same restrictions as above, but the Committee can also appoint supervisors for the competition. While an aide is someone who helps an individual player, a supervisor is not assigned to any specific player – they are there to help any player as needed. A couple other differences when applying the Rules is that a supervisor is treated as an outside influence, and a player may not ask for or get advice from a supervisor.

## All Categories of Disability

No matter the type of disability a player has, the USGA encourages officials to use its discretion on applying unreasonable delay penalties, as certain disabilities can cause slower play through no fault of the player. As long as the player is doing their best, the Committee should use a more relaxed interpretation of what constitutes unreasonable delay. The last point that the modified Rules make when officiating players with disabilities is that it can often be difficult or impossible for a player to drop a ball in the correct way. For example, if a player has no way of knowing whether they dropped from knee-height, the Committee should accept the player's reasonable judgment that they have done so. On top of that, any reasonable effort to drop the ball in the correct way should be accepted, since some disabilities can make this process painful or impossible.

Thank you for reading this, I hope it was illuminating since this is not a topic that gets too much recognition in golf discussions, and it's important to the game of golf that we don't marginalize anybody who's interested in playing. Hopefully this will help you provide some fun opportunities for any disabled members at your club, and create a rewarding competitive environment for any outside programs you may be volunteering for.

-Max Doctoroff, PGA